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ABSTRACT

This report describes a program designed to develop positive attitudes toward reading and to improve achievement in third and fourth grade students in two Midwestern communities. Teachers' observations and conversations with parents and students indicated students did not receive essential reading practice time to improve skills. Analysis of probable cause data revealed reasons for avoidance of independent reading included poor attitude, ability, competing activities, and low value of reading. Instructional methods, time constraints, and demand for more skills instruction and testing contributed to the lack of independent reading time. When time was provided, students often used it ineffectively. Review of professional literature resulted in selection of several interventions: daily independent reading time, use of the Accelerated Reader program, and instructional strategies to improve reading attitude and achievement. Post intervention data indicated an increase in reading achievement, but was inconclusive in regard to attitude toward reading. Appendixes contain a parent questionnaire and an observation checklist. (Contains 28 references, and 4 tables and 6 figures of data.) (Author/RS)

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IMPROVING STUDENT ATTITUDE AND ACHIEVEMENT IN READING THROUGH DAILY READING PRACTICE AND TEACHER INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This report describes a program designed to develop positive attitudes toward reading and to improve achievement in third and fourth grade students in two Midwestern communities. Teachers' observations and conversations with parents and students indicated students did not receive essential reading practice time to improve skills.

Analysis of probable cause data revealed reasons for avoidance of independent reading included poor attitude, ability, competing activities, and low value of reading. Instructional methods, time constraints, and demand for more skills instruction and testing contributed to the lack of independent reading time. When time was provided, students often used it ineffectively.

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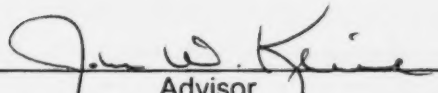

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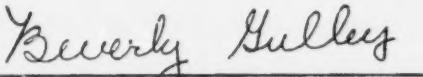

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND CONTEXT

General Statement of the Problem

In order to become better readers, children need time to practice reading skills. In today's society, students are offered a wide variety of activities with which to fill their time. Their choices include activities such as television, video games, sports, music, dance, and various organized youth activities. Parents often do not place a priority on independent reading practice at home because they are not aware of its value. Statements from parents have indicated that their children are involved in so many outside activities that they do not have time to read. Also, the teacher/researchers have observed in the classroom that when given a choice, many children will select activities other than reading. When questioned about why they are not reading, their response will often be that it is boring or it is too hard. With increased expectations and additional curriculum requirements, teachers find it difficult to provide adequate time for independent reading within the school day. As a result, students are not getting the practice they need to become proficient readers. Because many students do not experience success, they are not motivated to choose reading as a pastime. Evidence for the existence of this problem includes past observations by third and fourth grade teachers and conversations with parents and students.

Immediate Problem Context

Site A

The targeted elementary school was in a small Midwestern town, which was part of a unit district with approximately 54% of the students being transported daily. In 1992 a nearby district dissolved and merged with Site A which added 150 new students to the district. The building housed 540 early childhood through fourth grade students who fed into the district junior high and high school.

The school was constructed in 1968, and it was altered in 1997 when a gymnasium, four classrooms, two bathrooms, and an office were added. The school was organized into self-contained classrooms. The early childhood and prekindergarten classes each provided two half-day sessions of instruction for Site A.

The average class size was 20 students, with four or five sections per grade level. White students comprised 98.9% of the student body, 0.4% were Black, and 0.8% were Asian. Free or reduced lunches were received by 49.2% of the total student population. Breakfast was also provided on a daily basis to any student. Student attendance was 95.1%, and the mobility rate was 19.2%, with a 4.3% incidence rate of truancy (School Report Card 2000).

The primary mission of the school was to help children develop healthy self-esteem and basic learning skills needed to be confident life-long learners. All staff members at Site A were White. There were 26 regular education teachers, 5 Title I teachers, and 4 special education teachers who were all female. One regular education teacher and two physical education teachers were male. Each grade level had a shared aide, except kindergarten, which had an aide for each classroom. Four special education teachers had an aide, and three personal aides were assigned to students with special needs. Physical education was provided five days a week, and a music

teacher met with the students twice weekly. A librarian and a library aide met for 30 minutes each week with the students. Children also had access to the computer lab for 30 minutes each week under the direction of a technology aide. A Title I teacher worked with selected students on a daily basis, providing math and reading support to qualified students. High ability students attended a pullout gifted program once a week for half of a day. The elementary students were offered no extracurricular activities. A county special education office, housed in the building, provided various services to meet the needs of all eligible individuals within the district. A part-time dean of students assisted the principal with discipline problems encountered during the school day. The district shared one nurse, and each building had a counselor. The building counselor met bimonthly with individual classrooms and offered lessons on conflict management, divorce, and drug awareness. Two speech pathologists serviced the building on a daily basis.

The targeted fourth grade classroom at Site A was located on the second floor of the new addition. Students kept their daily belongings in a personal locker located in the hallway. Students sat at individual desks that were arranged in groups of four to five students per group. The beige carpeting on the floor helped minimize the noise when students were working cooperatively. There were two large bookcases, filled with books labeled for the Accelerated Reader program (Advantage Learning Systems, 1993) attached to the north wall with the heating and cooling system placed between them. A large window was located directly over the heating and cooling system and looked out onto the playground. There was one Internet accessible computer that the teacher and students utilized. Two bulletin boards flanked each side of a chalkboard in the front and rear of the room. Two bulletin boards, placed along the same wall, were used as the "Wall of Fame" and displayed weekly contest winners, while the other two

boards displayed students' artwork and photographs taken throughout the year. The entire south wall contained closets for the teacher to use. A single desk sat in the back of the room where disruptive students went for time alone.

The physical characteristics of fourth grade Classroom C, the control group to match Classroom A, were exactly the same as those of Classroom A. Female teachers taught both fourth grade classes.

Classroom D was the third grade control group to match Classroom B and was taught by a male teacher in an older part of the building. Students were seated in groups of four to five. There were two entrances into the room on the same wall. The gray tile floor and green walls lent an institutional feel to the room. A large window on the south wall looked out onto the roof, which caused the room to sometimes become too warm. Chalkboards lined three walls of the room along with two small bulletin boards that provided limited display space. As a result, student work was showcased on the walls and dangled from the ceiling. There was one computer that was Internet accessible and could be utilized by teacher and students. A semicircular table sat in the rear of the room and offered a quiet place for small group instruction. A number of learning centers were scattered throughout the room where clusters of students who had finished their work could be found.

Parental input into educational decisions was provided through the principal's council which met four times during the school year. The council was comprised of teachers, parents, and business owners. In addition, the school had a strong, active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) that met monthly and provided many student-centered activities. The PTO raised approximately $15,000 and used it for student assemblies, tickets for each child to attend a fine

arts event, and more costly items needed by students and teachers. Each teacher was given $100 to purchase materials to benefit students.

District

"The primary mission of the school district is to be sure there is a teacher in every classroom who cares that every student, every day, learns and grows and feels like a real human being." Emphasis was placed on creating an effective school climate through positive reinforcement of each student's efforts and achievements.

The entire district was made up of three educational facilities, which included one elementary building (pre-k through 4), one junior high building (grades 5-8), and one high school (grades 9-12) with a total enrollment of 1,272. The high school provided competitive college prep courses. Approximately 45% of the students who graduated from this district pursued some form of higher education (School Report Card 2000).

The faculty consisted of 96 classroom teachers, 26.6 % male and 73.4 % female. The pupil-teacher ratio for the district was 14.6:1. The average teacher's experience was 13.8 years with an average salary of $36,504. Nine percent of the teachers held a master's degree or above. The district administration consisted of three principals, two assistant principals, two part-time deans of students, and one superintendent with an average salary of $69,289. The district's operating expenditure per pupil was $5,903 per year, far less than the state average of $7,146 (School Report Card 2000).

Teachers and administrators had developed an objective-based curriculum. The curriculum was reviewed and updated on a regular basis to ensure alignment with the state goals and standards. The district's focus was in the area of reading but was shifting toward math. All curriculum areas provided objectives that were appropriate at each grade level. The curriculum

areas taught at each grade level were language arts, math, physical education, science, health, and social studies. Criterion-referenced tests provided assessment in each area with the exception of physical education. The tests were used to correlate the curriculum to the students' learning.

Communication between the school district and the community existed in the form of the school report card, the local newspaper, radio, and parent-teacher conferences, which were held at the end of the first quarter. The elementary building distributed weekly newsletters, and the middle school distributed monthly newsletters. The elementary school and the middle school hosted an annual open house.

The Surrounding Community

Community A had a total population of 3,641, as indicated by the 1990 census. This rural community sat on a river and was centrally located between three larger Midwestern cities. These larger cities provided additional educational and cultural facilities, large hospitals, and numerous retail businesses.

A small modern community hospital provided medical services to neighboring communities. Also included in the community were two grocery stores, two banks, and numerous other small retail shops. Several small manufacturing plants offered below-average wages for approximately 1,000 employees (Local Community Profile, 1995). The median family income was $21,944, and the median house value was $36,600. Education seemed to have little value to the citizens of this community, since 38% had a high school diploma, and only 11.6% had earned a college degree (Illinois InfoAtlas Demographic Profile, 1990).

The town was the county seat and had a mayor-alderman form of government. There were 5 full-time fire department personnel and 15 volunteers. The police department employed 9

full-time officers. Recreation was provided by the four parks, four tennis courts, two golf courses, a swimming pool, and boating facilities. Four major universities, within a one-hour drive, sponsored many educational and fine arts programs that were open to the public (Local Community Profile, 1995).

Church played an important part in the lives of the citizens of this small community. Religious needs were met by attending any of 13 churches that are located within the area (Local Community Profile, 1995).

Site B

The targeted elementary school was an air-conditioned, single-story, brick building that was constructed in 1990 and housed early childhood, prekindergarten, and kindergarten through third grade students. Four wings radiated from the main administrative portion of the building, each containing six regular education classrooms and additional rooms for special education, library, art, music, physical education, reading and math resource, and gifted classes. A large, windowed lobby area welcomed visitors and provided an area for classes to utilize when larger groups needed to gather for activities. A large multi-purpose room, which could be divided with a movable wall, was the location for physical education classes, the cafeteria, and assemblies. At the point where the four wings meet, a skylight provided natural light to the hub of the building. The hallways were always colorfully decorated with displays of student work on the walls and also hanging from the ceiling.

Of the 496 students enrolled, 99% were White and 1% were Black. Only 4% of the population were considered low-income and eligible to receive free or reduced lunches. The school had an attendance rate of 96.8%, a mobility rate of 4.3%, and no instances of truancy. The average class size was 21 students (School Report Card, 2000).

A vocal music teacher, a librarian, a physical education teacher, a math and reading resource teacher, four special education teachers, and a speech pathologist, supported the staff of 24 regular education teachers. Additional teachers in physical education, art, and gifted education were shared with other buildings. Bachelor's degrees were held by 85.3% of the teachers, and several of those were working on a master's degree. The remaining 14.7% had a master's degree. The teaching experience of the 100% White female staff averaged 13.8 years, with an average salary of $36,596 (School Report Card, 2000). The librarian, early childhood, prekindergarten, and one special education teacher were supported with classroom aides, in addition to three individual aides for students with special needs. A nurse and social worker were assigned to the building to help meet the nonacademic needs of the students.

Reading, English, spelling, math, social studies, and science were taught in the regular education self-contained classrooms. Students left their classrooms for three thirty-minute classes of physical education and two thirty-minute classes of music per week. Library and art classes each met once a week for thirty minutes.

There were several programs to support students both academically and emotionally. High ability students were sent to a gifted classroom twice a week to engage in enrichment activities. That teacher also offered an enrichment reading class for second graders and an accelerated math program for third graders. Since the school did not qualify for Title I funds, the district provided a resource teacher for students needing support in reading and math who did not qualify for special education. Anger management and divorce groups were conducted by the social worker weekly for six weeks during the middle of the school year. For latchkey children, the YMCA of the nearby capital city ran a before and after school program in the building.

The Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) actively supported teachers and students with both time and money. Parent volunteers were present two days a week to duplicate papers, cut out or laminate materials, and do other tasks requested by teachers. In addition, the PTO raised $15,000-$20,000 each year which was usually targeted for more expensive purchases, such as playground equipment or technology needs. In addition, each teacher was given $75.00 at the beginning of the school year to help with classroom start-up costs. The PTO also sponsored a third grade celebration at the local park, a family Bingo night once a year, and one or two roller skating events for students at a rink in the nearby capital city.

The targeted third grade classroom at Site B was an average-sized room located in one wing of the building with five other third grades and the early childhood class. The blue carpeting on the floor helped minimize the noise when students were working cooperatively. To facilitate group work, desks were arranged in groups of three or four. There were two bookshelves at a reading center full of books labeled for the Accelerated Reader program (Advantage Learning Systems, 1993). Four Internet-accessible computers and a printer lined one wall to provide enrichment and support for activities in the various subject areas. A center containing math enrichment and reinforcement activities at the back of the room was a popular place for students to gather. Also at the back of the room in the opposite corner was the writing center, which had a shelf for dictionaries and encyclopedias as well as "super speller" activities for those students who earned 100% on the weekly pretest in spelling. Small groups met at a rectangular table centered near the back of the room. Six bulletin boards provided plenty of space for colorful displays to enhance classroom activities. Opposite the door were two large windows with miniblinds which looked out onto a windowless brick wall, separated from the third grade wing by a grassy area with a few small trees. A sidewalk next to the brick wall led to the doors

near the cafeteria. Since this was an area that was relatively free of activity, it did not usually cause students to be distracted from classroom activities. On the wall next to a window at the front of the room, were mounted the television monitor and videocassette recorder, which were used for educational videos and whole class viewing of computer presentations. Chalkboards, which were blue to match the rest of the room, were located on the front and rear walls. The coat room and storage cabinets were separated from the classroom by a wall that was open at both ends for entry and exit.

The District

Site B was a unit district which included an elementary school (grades kindergarten through three), a middle school (grades four through six), a junior high (grades seven and eight), and a high school (grades nine through twelve) with a total enrollment of 1,795. The faculty consisted of 105 classroom teachers, 29.5% male and 70.5% female. Whites made up 99.0% of the staff, while 1.0% were Hispanic. The district administration consisted of four principals, an assistant principal, a director of extra-curricular activities, an assistant superintendent, and a superintendent with an average salary of $67,697.

The average operating expenditure per pupil was $4,777 which was significantly less than the state average (School Report Card, 2000). The district administration prided itself on providing a high quality of education with such a small per pupil expenditure. Due to the quality of education, the school system played a large part in attracting families to the community. The caring, dedicated staff was concerned not only with the academic needs of the students, but also with their social and emotional needs. This was evidenced by the district's mission statement which stated: "All individuals involved in education in the district will be encouraged and enabled to develop the attitudes and values necessary to learn the skills and acquire the

knowledge to reach their full potential as a positive contributing member of an ever-changing global society."

An objective-based curriculum had been developed by the district teachers and administrators. Grade level teams in the lower grades and subject area teams in the upper grades regularly reviewed and updated the curriculum to ensure its alignment with state standards and goals. Exit skills tests had been developed by the teachers to assess student mastery of the different subject areas and were given at the end of the school year.

The teachers were included in a site-based decision making program through building leadership teams that met monthly. Each building also sent a representative to the monthly meeting of the district leadership team. All teams worked with the administration to provide recommendations for school policies and improvements.

A quarterly district newsletter, the school report card, and articles in the local weekly newspaper facilitated communication between the district and the community. More direct opportunities for communication with parents were provided by a meet-the-teacher night, an open house, and conferences at the end of the first quarter.

The Surrounding Community

Site B was located in an attractive, rural suburban community with a population of 2,838 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1998). It was a bedroom community for the nearby capital city of a state located in the Midwest, as well as a farming community. The town contained one locally owned grocery store, a hardware store, several small restaurants, two gas stations, a bank, and numerous other small businesses. A group of small retail establishments had recently opened in an area of historic buildings, hoping to draw tourists from the national historic sites located in the capital city just ten minutes away.

The median family income was $46,082, and the median house value was $79,700. Education was important to the people of this community as evidenced by the 29.0% who had high school diplomas and the 35.7% who were college graduates (Illinois InfoAtlas Demographic Profile, 1990). As a result, parents were very involved in fund raising and volunteering to support their community school district.

The town had a mayor-council form of government, and governmental services included a volunteer fire department, police protection, a library, and various other services. A park and a bike trail provided recreational opportunities locally for citizens. A wide range of cultural and recreational activities was available in the nearby capital city. Three colleges located in this capital city sponsored many educational and fine arts programs open to the public.

Church played an important part in the lives of the citizens of this small town. Religious needs were met by attending any of the seven churches that were located within the immediate area.

National Context of the Problem

The question of whether or not increased independent reading time affects achievement and motivation is a dilemma that has been a focus of study by researchers across the United States. Educators believe that, like any other skill, reading is an ability that will improve with practice. After learning the basic subskills, students need time to apply them in order to develop automaticity, thus allowing students to derive meaning from the text. In Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Heibert, Scott and Wilkinson, 1985), the Commission on Reading states that the best way to ensure success in reading for students is to provide them with time to practice the whole skill of reading. Yet there is a decline in reading for pleasure in the United States that is causing widespread concern (Moser & Morrison, 1998).

The research examining the relationship of achievement to time spent reading independently has produced mixed results. Some researchers have found a positive link between amount of time spent reading and reading achievement (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988; Taylor, Frye & Maruyama, 1990). However, Collins (1980) found that students involved in sustained silent reading, a form of independent reading, did not demonstrate an improvement in achievement. Another dilemma facing researchers is the question of whether reading causes greater achievement or whether achievement causes increased reading. In other words, does practice make better readers, or do good readers choose to read more? (Topping & Paul, 1999; Taylor et al., 1990). Researchers have been more successful in showing a positive link between attitude and achievement. Gambrell (1996) states that in order for students to develop into proficient readers, they must possess the will to read in addition to the necessary skills. White (1989) found that when students have a positive attitude about reading, they are more motivated to read and their achievement improves.

Children are faced with a wide choice of leisure activities in today's society. As a result, reading is often at the bottom of the list of activities they choose to do in their spare time (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995; Morrison & Moser, 1998). Given the little amount of time devoted to independent reading in school, it is not surprising that more reading is not done outside of school (Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988). However, teachers find it difficult to allot time for independent reading. They are expected to cover more material as well as ensure students receive instruction on skills necessary to score well on statewide tests (Worthy, Turner & Moorman, 1998). As a result, as much as 70% of reading instruction time is spent doing worksheets. Since teachers are not making independent reading a priority, students also minimize its importance. (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). In spite of the time constraints

preventing teachers from including more independent reading in their instructional day, they ranked motivating students to read as one of their most immediate concerns (Veeman, 1984, as cited in Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzoni, 1995). The value teachers place on motivation is further illustrated by a national survey of teachers that stated "creating interest in reading was considered the most important area for future research" (Alvermann, Gambrell, Guthrie, O'Flahavan, & Stahl, 1992, as cited in Gambrell, et al., p. 1, 1995).

CHAPTER 2

PROBLEM DOCUMENTATION

Problem Evidence

Through observation and conversations with students, parents, and other teachers, the teacher-researchers have seen evidence that students devote insufficient time to independent reading. In order to establish a baseline to assess the success of the interventions instituted in this project, several instruments were used to collect data during the first two weeks of the school year in August. The teacher-researchers developed a survey (Appendix A), which parents completed, and administered the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1995) to students in the targeted classrooms. Teachers of the control classrooms collected parent surveys and administered the ERAS and MRP to students in those classrooms. In addition, a trained professional conducted classroom observations during silent reading time in each classroom using a checklist created by teacher-researchers (Appendix B).

The parent questionnaire on student recreational reading habits consisted of 10 questions designed to determine how much time students spent reading independently at home and if reading was modeled and valued at home. Parents responded by marking 4 Often, 3 Sometimes, 2 Seldom, or 1 Never to questions on the survey. Numbers were then used to determine a total score for each student, with the higher scores representing the more positive home reading

environment. Results of the parent survey supported the researchers' theory that students devote insufficient time to independent reading at home. Of the parents surveyed, 87.1% stated their children often have free time, yet only 19% of these children read for enjoyment at home every day. The survey also indicated 95.2% of the homes have reading materials available for their children, but only 11.3% of the children often chose to read a book. Even though families placed a high value on reading, only 19.4% of the students read for enjoyment every day. According to parental responses, 32.3% of their children seldom or never read at home. A summary of the parent survey is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Parent Survey Results

	Averages of Entire Group			
Survey Question	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
My child reads independently for enjoyment at home every day.	19.4%	48.4%	19.4%	12.9%
I read to or with my child.	22.6%	56.5%	19.4%	1.6%
If given a choice of free time activities, my child will choose to read a book.	11.3%	35.5%	33.9%	19.4%
We visit the public library.	21.0%	27.4%	37.1%	14.5%
My child sees me reading.	59.7%	30.6%	6.5%	3.2%
My child has time each day for free choice activities.	87.1%	12.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Reading materials are available for my child at home.	95.2%	3.2%	0.0%	1.6%
My child shares and/or discusses what s/he's reading with me.	43.5%	43.5%	8.1%	4.8%
I ask my child questions about books s/he is reading.	43.5%	48.4%	6.5%	1.6%
My child chooses reading material s/he can read independently.	74.2%	17.7%	8.1%	0.0%

The Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) was administered in about a 15-minute period to students in both targeted and control classrooms. In the survey, pictures of a cartoon character were used to depict four reactions, ranging from very happy to very upset. Classroom teachers read the 20 questions on the survey to students and instructed them to circle the expression that best showed how they felt about each question. Each item was assigned 1, 2, 3, or 4 points, with a 4 indicating the happiest expression. A raw score was determined for each student. A mean for each class was then calculated. According to the directions for interpreting the results of the ERAS, a raw score of 25 indicates a relatively indifferent overall attitude toward reading. As the score increases from 25, a more positive attitude is indicated. An increasingly negative attitude is indicated as scores decrease from 25. The means from Classrooms A and B indicated that students had a moderately positive attitude toward recreational reading, while the means from Classrooms C and D reflected a slightly better than indifferent attitude. A summary of the ERAS results is shown in Figure 1.

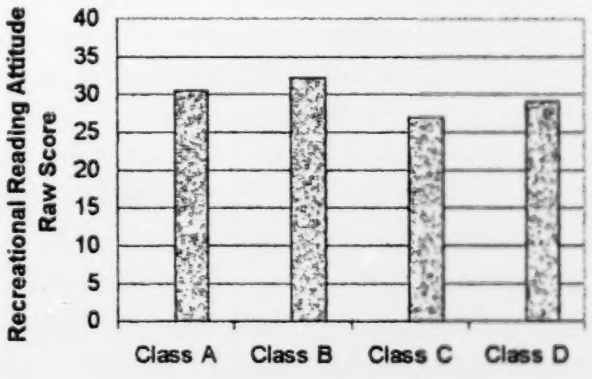

Figure 1 Elementary Reading Survey (ERAS) Summary

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) consisted of two parts: a reading survey and a conversational interview. The reading survey was the only part used, since it provided the

information needed for this project. It assessed two dimensions of reading motivation for each student: self-concept as a reader and the perceived value of reading. Teachers in each of the four classrooms read the 20 items on the instrument to their students in a 15–20 minute period of time. The four possible survey responses were based on a 4-point Likert scale. A raw score was tabulated for self-concept, for value of reading, and for the full survey. Then each raw score was converted to a percentage score, and a mean was calculated for each classroom. As Figure 2 shows, students in all four classrooms placed strong importance on the value of reading, and students also had positive self-concepts of themselves as readers.

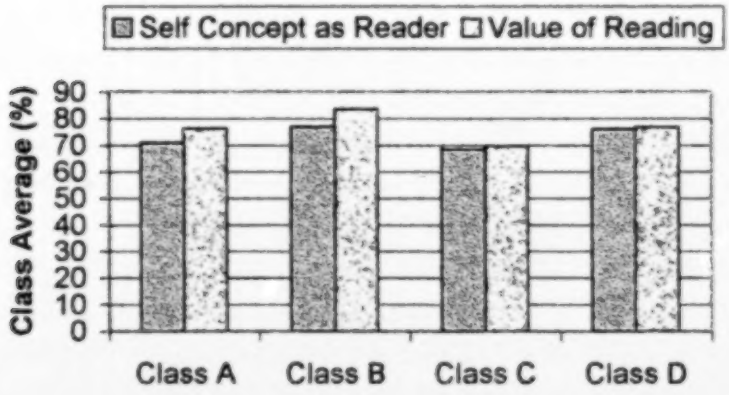

Figure 2 Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) Summary

Viewing the results from the data collected substantiates the concern that students devoted insufficient time to independent reading. Even though students saw the value of reading and perceived themselves as good readers, they were not devoting time to the practice of reading, according to the parent survey results. The ERAS results showed that students did not have a positive attitude toward recreational reading, which would explain why parents indicated students did not choose it as a free time activity at home.

Probable Causes

The literature suggested a number of reasons students do not spend time practicing reading skills by reading independently. Some of those causes are centered on the individual student, and others are related to the educational setting.

Students' attitudes toward reading have a major impact on whether reading is high or low on their list of activities to do in their spare time. Often it is thought that only low-ability readers are the ones with negative attitudes toward reading, but even high-achieving readers can share those attitudes. Students' attitudes are greatly influenced by the value both peers and family put on reading, and can be developed very early in children's lives. Cultural environments, as well as gender expectations, are other factors that can influence the value a child places on reading. If the perceived value of reading is low, growth of reading ability will be stunted, students will experience frustration, and their belief that reading has little value will be confirmed (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995). Students in Class B are from a higher socio-economic background than students in Classes A, C, and D. Data collected from the ERAS (Figure 1) and MRP (Figure 2) surveys indicated students in Class B placed a higher value on reading and had a more positive attitude toward recreational reading than students in Classes A, C, and D. "A number of current theories suggest that self-perceived competence and task value are major determinants of motivation and task engagement." (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1995, p. 1).

A low level of reading ability causes students to avoid recreational reading. Frequent frustrating experiences lead them to develop a negative attitude toward reading. Their comprehension of the material read is limited, and the amount of reading they are able to accomplish is restricted (Wilkinson, Wardrop & Anderson, 1988). As a result, these low-ability

students do not consider reading to be an enjoyable experience, will avoid it as much as possible, and will perceive reading as being too difficult. Often, it is a boring experience because their low ability prevents them from reading books at their interest level. Because these students choose not to read, they are not getting the practice necessary to improve reading skills, which would lessen frustration and increase their interest. Teachers in the targeted schools have observed that low-ability students in their classrooms are the ones most often off-task during independent reading time. They find numerous reasons to get out of their seats, look around the room for other sources for their attention, or stare into space or at their book and daydream. These students certainly do not choose to read when given time for free-choice activities in the classroom, nor do they pursue reading as a recreational activity at home.

As students become older, there are more and more leisure-time activities available to them. Usually poor readers will choose to engage in activities other than reading because they find them more rewarding. Even for students who find reading a pleasurable experience, alternate activities may be even more pleasurable (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995). As a result, there is often less time devoted to reading. In student-teacher conferences in the targeted schools, students related that with sports practices, music or dance lessons, scouts, and church activities, they had little time left in which to read. One third-grade student, who was a high-ability avid reader and was also very athletic, indicated that with sports practices it was hard to find time to read at home. He also admitted that when the weather was nice and he had free time, he would rather be outside playing with his brother and friends than reading. In a conversation a couple of months later, he indicated that he had read almost 100 pages the night before. When asked how he had found the time, he said soccer season was over, so he had more time to read. It

is clear that this high-achieving student's time spent reading was influenced by factors other than ability or attitude.

In the report Becoming a Nation of Readers (Anderson, Heibert, Scott, and Wilkinson, 1985), the Commission on Reading reported that fifth graders seldom read for pleasure. " Fifty percent of them read books for an average of 4 minutes per day or less, 30% read 2 minutes per day or less, and 10% reported never reading any book on any day. Only 1% or less of the children's free time was used for reading from books" (p. 77).

Topping and Paul noted in their study "The amount of reading practice occurring in schools is very low" (1999, p. 226). Often teachers consider silent reading to be an enrichment activity, and students are only allowed time to read when they have finished other work. Thus the lower-ability students are usually the ones who are not given the time to practice, even though they might benefit the most. The teacher-researchers have been guilty of this practice themselves, in the past. Without a scheduled independent reading time each day, the only students who had time to read were the high-achieving students who finished their work quickly.

Even when teachers are aware of the value of providing time for independent reading practice, it is difficult to find time in a busy school day. "With larger classes, more paperwork, and increasing demands to cover more curricula and to improve test performance, some teachers did not feel that they also had enough time to provide regular opportunities for reading self-selected texts..." (Worthy, Turner & Moorman, 1998, p. 6). In an in-service guided reading presentation at one of the targeted schools, the presenting teachers from another district indicated they did not have time to include independent reading in their daily schedule. There were too many other activities in their guided reading program to allow time for free-choice reading. Based on conversations with other teachers, this is a common occurrence. Comments by third

grade teachers indicated that preparing students for state testing had to take priority over time for independent reading. Fourth grade students had a study hall in which to complete homework. They were allowed to read independently when work was completed. As a result, only the more capable students usually had time to read. The students who needed the reading practice most were the ones least likely to receive it. If teachers do not make independent reading a priority at school, it is not surprising that many students do not make it a priority at home.

When teachers are able to provide time for students to read independently, the time is not always used effectively. "...time allocated to reading does not necessarily equate to time engaged in reading, particularly at the right level and successfully" (Topping & Paul, 1999, p. 227). In most silent reading programs, students read a self-selected book while the teacher models reading by also reading a book. There is no student accountability; weak readers may be practicing ineffectively or be off task, and teachers are not monitoring student reading or intervening to promote success. Teachers have no way of knowing whether a student actually used the allotted time to read, or whether the student comprehended the material if he did read it. The teacher-researchers often felt frustrated during silent reading time in their classrooms because it was impossible to assess how well students utilized the time. For some students, independent reading was a time to do nothing without the teacher knowing that the assigned activity was not being done.

Because of poor attitude, low ability, and more leisure time activities available, students often do not choose to read at home. It is difficult for teachers to provide time for independent reading at school with requirements to cover more curricula as well as increase test scores. Even when students are given time for independent reading, there often is no assurance they are actually using the time to read. However, if students are to improve attitudes and abilities in

reading, they must have time to practice. Since students do not seem to be reading at home, teachers need to provide this essential practice time at school. In order to ensure students utilize independent reading time effectively, teachers need to have a way to hold students accountable for what they read and monitor their progress.

CHAPTER 3

THE SOLUTION STRATEGY

Literature Review

After reviewing the literature, the researchers found that there was no conclusive evidence that independent reading practice alone had a positive effect on reading achievement and attitude. The following studies provided evidence to support a positive effect. Taylor, Frye and Maruyama (1990) found the minutes of reading per day during reading class increased reading achievement significantly. They also felt that further research was needed to support their study regarding time spent reading independently. Worthy, Turner and Moorman (1998) stated that when students were given time to read in school, they developed a more positive attitude toward reading as well as increased achievement. Students became much more engaged and involved in reading. Independent reading is an important component of a balanced reading program and is one of the best ways for students to become fluent, capable readers. Independent reading also benefits students by developing vocabulary and improving comprehension (Center for the Study of Reading, 1990, as cited in Jonson, 1998).

Additional evidence was provided by Leinhardt (1985) as cited in Topping and Paul (1999) when it was found that adding just five extra minutes of independent reading a day resulted in gains in grade level equivalent. However, when Wilkinson, Wardrop and Anderson

(1988) performed a reanalysis of his study, they discovered errors in his methods that negated his conclusion of silent reading having a significant effect upon achievement. Research read seemed to support that silent reading had a positive effect on students' attitude toward reading, but was inconclusive regarding the effects of silent reading on achievement. In reviewing twelve studies, Manning-Dowd (1985) found six studies showing silent reading had a significant effect on reading scores, while five studies indicated there was no significant improvement. Collins (1980) conducted a study over a 15-week period, which resulted in the conclusion that silent reading had no effect on attitude or achievement. Upon reviewing the literature on independent reading time and its effect upon attitude and achievement, the teacher-researchers decided that additional interventions were needed to make a significant impact on achievement as well as attitude.

One of the weaknesses in the studies of impact of reading time on achievement was when students were given time to read, they were not necessarily engaged in reading. They may be off-task or practicing ineffectively. Topping & Paul (1999) addressed the weakness in their study by ensuring students were engaged in reading books that were appropriate for their ability level. The researchers also monitored and diagnosed students in order to implement interventions to help students become successful and hold them accountable for having done the reading. Topping and Paul found that reading practice could increase reading achievement. They used a software package from Advantage Learning Systems, Incorporated called the Accelerated Reader (AR) which is a reading comprehension and management program. Students read leveled books and then took computer-generated multiple-choice tests to assess comprehension. The program then provided diagnostic feedback that made students, parents, and teachers aware of successes, and allowed teachers to intervene as necessary to make changes to improve students' success rate. When teachers monitored and diagnosed students' reading practice in order to make

appropriate interventions, they could ensure students were using time to their best advantage. Topping and Paul (1998) found higher reading achievement resulted from more effective reading practice. Students needed to be supported, to be held accountable, and to be reading at a level that was appropriate for each individual's ability in order to be successful and to avoid feeling frustrated. Reading logs served as an effective aid for achieving these goals by providing teachers with records of what and how much students were reading. Logs also provided students with feelings of accomplishment as they reflected upon the amount of reading they had successfully completed.

Reading logs and computer diagnostic reports provided by the AR program allowed the teacher to monitor each student's progress and intervene through student-teacher conferencing, which served several purposes. The teacher could help build self-confidence in each student as a reader and help each individual to know what improvements needed to be made (Hunt, 1970). From conferences, teachers could gain information that would enable them to assess appropriate text levels, to plan mini-lessons, to extend understanding, and to support or extend students' thinking (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Another study consisting of two separate projects used the AR program with positive results, indicating the AR program yielded reading achievement gains superior to the gains made using alternative methods. Only the girls in the study demonstrated significant gains in attitude (Vollands, Topping & Evans, 1999). Rains (1993) found that using the AR program enabled students to become more aware of reading accomplishments. As students viewed their successes through computer printouts of reading activities, they became motivated to read even more.

When pupils were able to self-select books geared toward their interests and at the appropriate ability level, they were more motivated to read. Evidence suggested there was a

strong link between choice and the development of intrinsic motivation (Paris & Oka, 1986; Rodin, Rennery, & Solomon, 1980; Turner, 1992, as cited in Gambrell, 1996). Students also put more effort into comprehending the reading material when they were allowed to make choices (Schiefele, 1991, as cited in Gambrell, 1996). Teachers have observed that students are motivated to successfully read material that is beyond their instructional level when it is chosen for personal interest (Hunt, 1970; Fink, 1996 as cited in Worthy, Turner and Moorman (1998). In addition, leading educators have advocated giving children a choice of reading materials as a method of providing enjoyable reading experiences (Allington, 1977; Anderson, et al., 1985, McCracken & McCracken, 1979; Routman, 1991; Trelease, 1989, as cited in Moser & Morrison, 1998).

In summary, in order for students to be successful in reading, self-selected books must be at the appropriate independent reading level. Research has shown a reader's past experiences of success or failure will greatly influence attitude (Ellsworth, Kear, & McKenna, 1995; Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1995). Therefore, to avoid unproductive reading and to maximize growth, students need to read material that is challenging, yet not frustrating (Vollands, Topping & Evans, 1999). Students need to be taught how to select books that are within their reading range in order to ensure effective reading practice (Jonson, 1998; Topping & Paul, 1999).

Teachers can greatly influence students' attitudes toward reading by using several techniques. Modeling reading via conversations about books read, showing enthusiasm about books and reading, and reading children's literature themselves in order to make recommendations to students, conveys to their students the value and pleasure of reading (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Gambrell, 1996; Moser & Morrison, 1998; Worthy Turner & Moorman, 1998).

Another method of exerting positive influence on attitude is to read aloud, exposing students to a greater variety of books. An increased awareness of the different genre of books encourages children to explore literature on their own. Teachers can also promote independent reading by providing book-rich environments. Classroom library collections need to contain a wide variety of books including those currently popular with children (Gambrell 1996; Moser & Morrison, 1998). The value of classroom libraries is demonstrated by several studies which suggested children read more, had better attitudes, and achieved greater gains in reading comprehension than children who did not have access to classroom libraries (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Teachers can also demonstrate the worth of books by using them as rewards (Gambrell, 1996).

Teachers can use instructional strategies to encourage students' engagement in reading, promoting both positive attitudes and achievements. Emphasizing silent rather than oral reading can help to encourage more positive attitudes. When students read orally, both students and teacher have the tendency to focus on what the student is doing wrong by continually correcting reading mistakes. It is much more effective to stress the positive rather than the negative when working to improve attitude and achievement. Students also spend more time actually engaged in the process of reading when reading silently than when participating in round-robin reading. Since the purpose of reading is to get meaning from the text, the reading can be turned into a silent search for ideas facilitated by the teacher. Better readers will develop from this method than from requiring perfection during oral reading (Hunt, 1970). When oral reading is to be done, assigning a paired reading activity can be very valuable. It allows children to share the enjoyment of literature, and can be beneficial to a weaker reader, or one who does not use time wisely (Jonson, 1998).

Findings of a number of research studies have supported the importance of social interaction in promoting achievement, higher level thinking, and intrinsic motivation to read (Allmasi, 1995; Slavin, 1990; Wood, 1990, as cited in Gambrell, 1996). It is important for teachers to provide time for students to discuss what they are reading with classmates. Since students value peers' book recommendations, this practice encourages students to read different kinds of books and improves their attitudes toward reading (Worthy, Turner & Moorman, 1998). Manning and Manning (1984) conducted a study that found the use of peer interaction yielded significant gains on a reading achievement test (as cited in Anderson, Wilson & Fielding, 1988).

Project Objectives and Processes

The targeted third and fourth grade students will increase reading achievement by more than the expected four months of growth through the following processes: 40 minutes of daily independent reading time, use of the Accelerated Reader program (Advantage Learning Systems, 1985), conferencing with the teacher, social interaction with peers related to reading material, and hearing literature read aloud. Growth in reading achievement will be measured by the STAR test (Advantage Learning Systems, 1996) and the Gates MacGinitie Reading test (Riverside Publishing Company, 1993). Targeted students will also demonstrate an increase in attitude and motivation over the same period as measured by the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, the Motivation to Read Profile, and a parent questionnaire. To accomplish the project objectives, the following processes will be utilized:

1. One third grade and one fourth grade classroom will be selected from Site A to serve as control classrooms. These classrooms will be chosen because they provide significantly less independent reading time than the targeted classrooms. Although the teachers in the control classrooms will use the Accelerated Reader

(AR) program, it will not be used for diagnostic and intervention purposes. Teachers of these classrooms will volunteer their students as control groups for this project.

2. Researchers will create and administer a parent questionnaire (Appendix A) and use the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna and Kear, 1990) and the Motivation to Read Profile (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1995) to collect data on students' motivation and attitude toward reading during the first two weeks and again during the last two weeks of the intervention period.

3. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading test and the STAR test will be administered to collect baseline data on each student during the first two weeks of the project in all four classes. These tools will be used again at the end of the 18-week period for comparison purposes.

4. An observation checklist (Appendix B) will be created by the researchers to be used by a trained professional on two different days at the beginning of the intervention and again at the end to record off-task behavior during independent reading time in all four classes.

5. A series of strategies to improve attitude, achievement, and motivation toward independent reading will be utilized throughout the 18-week period. Strategies include reading aloud to students, self-selection of books by students, providing book-rich classroom environments, allowing time for social interaction among students regarding their reading material, and conferencing with students about reading selections and progress. Throughout the 18-week period, the AR program

will be used to assess and diagnose students' independent reading progress in order to monitor and intervene when necessary.

Project Action Plan

Week 1

- Obtain parent permission for students' participation in the study from the targeted and control classes
- Send home the parent questionnaire on students' reading attitudes in the targeted and control classes
- Administer the Gates-MacGinitie Reading test to the targeted and control classes
- Administer the STAR test to the targeted and control classes
- Begin reading orally to students at least twice a week in the targeted classes

Week 2

- Begin 40 minutes of daily independent reading time in the targeted classes incorporating:
  - The Accelerated Reader Program to monitor the students' progress, diagnose problems, and make changes in individual goals and reading ranges as needed
  - Teacher-student conferencing regarding progress and book selections
  - Social interaction with peers related to literature being read
- Continue to read orally to students at least twice a week in the targeted classes
- Administer the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to the targeted and control classes
- Administer the Motivation to Read Profile in the targeted and control classes

- Conduct first observation of independent reading time to record off-task behaviors in the targeted and control classes

Week 3

- Continue 40 minutes of daily independent reading time in targeted classes incorporating the strategies listed in Week 2
- Continue reading orally to students at least twice a week in targeted classes
- Conduct second observation of independent reading time to record off-task behaviors in the targeted and control classes

Weeks 4 – 18

- Continue 40 minutes of daily independent reading time in the targeted classes incorporating the strategies listed in Week 2
- Continue to read orally to students at least twice a week in the targeted classes

Weeks 17 and 18

- Send home parent questionnaire on students' reading attitudes in the targeted and control classes
- Administer the Gates-MacGinitie Reading test to the targeted and control classes
- Administer the STAR test to the targeted and control classes
- Administer the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey to the targeted and control classes
- Administer the Motivation to Read Profile to the targeted and control classes
- Conduct observations during independent reading time to record off-task behaviors on two separate days in the targeted and control classes

Methods of Assessment

In order to assess the effects of the intervention, a researcher-created parent questionnaire (Appendix A), the Motivation to Read Profile, and the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey will be given to determine the students' attitudes toward reading. The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test and Advantage Learning Systems' STAR Test will be administered to establish each student's reading achievement level. These assessments will be administered to all four classrooms by their individual teachers. A trained professional at each site will use an observation checklist (Appendix B) on two different occasions to record off-task behaviors during independent reading time. All of these assessments will be administered at the beginning of the intervention period and again at the conclusion for comparison purposes.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT RESULTS

Historical Description of the Intervention

The objective of this action research was to increase third and fourth grade students' reading achievement, motivation, and attitude toward reading. In order to effect the desired changes, the following strategies were selected: 40 minutes of daily independent reading time in the classroom, use of the Accelerated Reader program (Advantage Learning Systems 1993), conferencing with the teacher, social interaction with peers related to reading material, and hearing literature read aloud.

The 40 minutes of daily independent reading time was provided for students to practice reading skills through reading self-selected material at their independent reading level as initially determined by the STAR test (Advantage Learning Systems, 1996). Teachers supervised the students' selection process to ensure reading material was within each student's assigned reading range. Students kept a record of books and pages read daily in a reading log that was checked several times a week by the teacher-researchers in order to monitor each student's progress and make any necessary adjustments to reading levels and to offer every student the greatest opportunity to succeed.

The Accelerated Reader program provided tests on the computer to assess students' comprehension of books they had read. Students earned points toward a monthly goal by achieving 60% or better on a test. Point goals for each student were determined by using a table provided by the Accelerated Reader program. Teachers used a combination of reading range and minutes read per day to assign a monthly point goal for each student based on information provided in the table. Before taking a test, students had to consult with the teacher to ensure that the book was within their reading range, and that they had a record in their log showing the pages they had read on each day. The teacher was able to use the results of the tests to adjust reading levels up or down so each student was reading at a level that provided optimum success.

Teachers held conferences with students to discuss reading progress a minimum of once a week. The topics varied according to the individual needs of each student. In addition to discussing the books students were reading, AR test scores, goals, and points earned with the AR program were subjects of discussion.

Periodically, students were given time to discuss with their peers what they had read. At the beginning of the action research project, whole-class discussions were used in order to model expectations. After a few weeks, students conducted small-group discussions on variety of teacher-assigned and self-selected topics. This activity was not done as often as the researchers expected when planning the project. They had planned to conduct small group discussions once per week, but the discussions were held only once every two or three weeks. In order to provide time for discussion, part of the 40-minute reading time had to be used, and the researchers were reluctant to reduce the reading time too often.

Teachers in the targeted and control classrooms read literature aloud to their students a minimum of twice a week. High-interest books were chosen that were at a higher reading level than that of most of the students in the class in order to create more excitement about reading.

Researchers developed a parent questionnaire (Appendix A) containing 10 items to survey parents about students' recreational reading habits and to learn the value families place on reading. Parents responded by marking Often, Sometimes, Seldom, or Never to questions on the survey. It was administered at the beginning and at the end of the project to document any changes.

In order to monitor changes in off-task behavior during independent reading time, researchers created an observation checklist (Appendix B) to be used by a professional other than the teacher-researchers at each site. The observer tallied off-task behaviors as they occurred, making note of students who were off-task more often than others and those who were off-task for more than 5 minutes at a time. Observations were made twice in each of the targeted and control classrooms before the interventions were implemented, and the results were averaged. The same process was to be done at the end of the 18 weeks, but since only one observation of each class could be done at one of the sites, only one observation of each classroom was used for postintervention data rather than an average of two.

Researchers used the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), which is a normed instrument that provides a quick indication of students' attitudes toward reading (McKenna & Kear, 1990). The 20-item survey can be administered to a classroom in approximately 10 minutes. A simple statement about reading is followed by four pictures of a cartoon character with each depicting a different emotion ranging from very positive to very negative. Teachers in

all classrooms administered the survey at the beginning of the project in August and again when the project concluded in December to assess changes in students' attitudes toward reading.

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) consists of two instruments: a reading survey and a conversational interview (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling & Mazzoni, 1995). Only the reading survey portion of the MRP was used because that was the portion that provided the information needed for the research. The reading survey measures self-concept as a reader and value placed on reading in a Likert-type, group-administered instrument containing 20 items and requiring 15-20 minutes to administer. It was utilized as a pre- and postmeasure to provide researchers with additional evidence of changes occurring in students' attitudes over the duration of the action research project.

The STAR test (Advantage Learning Systems, 1996) was used at the beginning and at the end of the project to assess students' grade equivalent (GE) growth in reading. It is software that generates a standardized cloze-type assessment to determine students' grade equivalent range of independent reading. The number of questions presented on each test varies based on the achievement level of each individual student.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading test (Riverside Publishing Company, 1993 and 2000) was an additional standardized test of grade equivalency used as further confirmation of students' growth in reading achievement. Different forms of the test were used as pre- and postmeasures.

Presentation and Analysis of Results

Data were collected from the targeted and control classrooms at the end of the action research project for comparison with data collected at the beginning of the project in order to analyze and assess the effects of the interventions.

The parent questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to assess the amount of recreational reading each student did at home as well as to get an overview of the family's general attitude toward reading. The pre- and postintervention results for fourth grade targeted Class A and third grade targeted Class B are shown in Table 2, and the results for fourth grade control Class C and third grade control Class D are shown in Table 3. The survey data showed that although both groups made positive gains in most areas, in several of the areas that dealt more directly with the students' attitudes about reading, the targeted classes had greater increases than the control classes.

As shown in Tables 2 and 3, both the targeted and control classes showed an increase in the combined percentages of students who Often or Sometimes read independently for enjoyment every day and a decrease in the combined percentages of students who Seldom or Never read independently for enjoyment. However, the targeted classes increased the percentages in the Often and Sometimes categories from 66% to 82% for a total of 16%, while the control classes increased the percentages from 71% to 81% for a total of 10%.

Control and targeted groups also both showed an increase in the combined percentages of students who Often or Sometimes choose to read a book when given a choice of free time activities and a decrease in the percentage of those who Seldom or Never do so (Tables 2 and 3). The targeted classes increased from 51% to 64% for a total increase of 13% in the Often or Sometimes categories, and the control classes increased from 41% to 48% for a total increase of 7%.

Tables 2 and 3 show visits to the public library seemed to increase with the targeted classes and decrease with the control classes. The combined percentages of Often and Sometimes

increased from 43% to 53% for a total increase of 10%. The same categories in the control classrooms decreased from 52% to 49% for a total decrease of 3%.

According to parent responses, only 88% of the students in the targeted classes were Often or Sometimes choosing books they could read independently prior to the interventions, but 100% of the students in the control classes were doing so after the interventions. Comparison of pre- and postsurveys using Tables 2 and 3 showed that the number of students in the Often or Sometimes categories increased from 88% to100% in the targeted classes and decreased from 100% to 97% in the control classes. Since the control groups were choosing books appropriately 100% of the time before the interventions, improvement was impossible. Therefore this decrease may not be meaningful.

Table 2

Summary of Parent Pre- and Postsurvey Responses for Targeted 3rd and 4th Grade Classrooms

Averages of Class A & Class B

Survey Question	Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Child reads for enjoyment at home every day.	23.0%	38.0%	43.0%	44.0%	20.0%	12.0%	14.0%	6.0%
I read to or with my child.	26.0%	24.0%	54.0%	59.0%	20.0%	15.0%	0.0%	3.0%
If given a choice of activities, child will choose to read.	11.0%	26.0%	40.0%	38.0%	31.0%	21.0%	17.0%	15.0%
We visit the public library.	14.0%	24.0%	29.0%	29.0%	43.0%	26.0%	14.0%	21%
My child sees me reading.	54.0%	62.0%	40.0%	26.0%	3.0%	12.0%	3.0%	0%
My child has time each day for free choice activities.	89.0%	85.0%	11.0%	12.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0%
Reading materials are available for my child at home.	94.0%	97.0%	6.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0%
My child discusses what s/he's reading with me.	43.0%	62.0%	46.0%	32.0%	6.0%	3.0%	6.0%	3.0%
I ask my child about books s/he is reading.	37.0%	38.0%	54.0%	59.0%	6.0%	3.0%	3.0%	0.0%
My child chooses reading material s/he can read independently.	71.0%	59.0%	17.0%	41.0%	11.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Table 3

Summary of Parent Pre- and Postsurvey Responses of 3rd and 4th Grade Control Classrooms

	Averages of Class C & Class D							
	Often		Sometimes		Seldom		Never	
Survey Question	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-	Pre-	Post-
Child reads for enjoyment at home every day.	15.0%	39.0%	56.0%	42.0%	19.0%	16.0%	11.0%	3.0%
I read to or with my child.	19.0%	19.0%	59.0%	52.0%	19.0%	23.0%	4.0%	6.0%
If given a choice of activities, child will will choose to read.	11.0%	16.0%	30.0%	32.0%	41.0%	35.0%	19.0%	16.0%
We visit the public library.	30.0%	10.0%	22.0%	39.0%	37.0%	35.0%	11.0%	16.0%
My child sees me reading.	67.0%	55.0%	22.0%	29.0%	11.0%	6.0%	0.0%	10.0%
My child has time each day for free choice activities.	85.0%	74.0%	11.0%	19.0%	4.0%	3.0%	0.0%	3.0%
Reading materials are available for my child at home.	96.0%	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
My child discusses what s/he's reading with me.	48.0%	68.0%	44.0%	26.0%	7.0%	6.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I ask my child about books s/he is reading.	52.0%	52.0%	41.0%	48.0%	7.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
My child chooses reading material s/he can read independently.	78.0%	68.0%	22.0%	29.0%	0.0%	3.0%	0.0%	0.0%

The Recreational Reading Attitude Survey portion of the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS) was given to collect data on students' attitudes before and after the interventions (McKenna and Kear, 1990). As shown in Figure 3, targeted fourth grade Class A showed about a 2% positive increase, and targeted third grade Class B showed little change in attitude. Fourth grade control Class C also showed little change, while third grade control Class D also showed about a 2% positive increase in attitude.

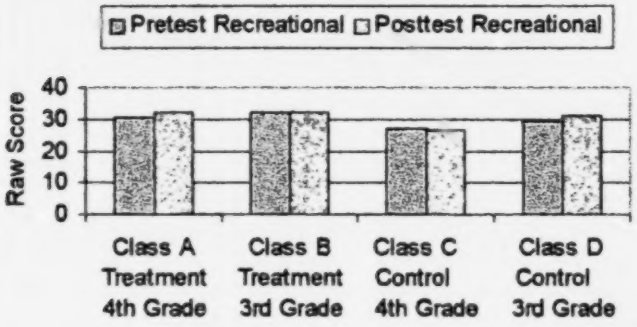

Figure 3 Elementary Reading Survey (ERAS) Summary of Pre- and Posttests

The Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) was an instrument used to collect data on students' self-concepts as readers and attitudes toward reading before and after the interventions (Gambrell, Codling, Palmer & Mazzoni, 1995). As shown in Figure 3, students in targeted fourth grade Class A had a 4% average increase in self-concept as a reader, while students in fourth grade control Class C showed a 2% increase. Targeted third grade Class B students showed an average 3% decrease in self-concept as a reader, and third grade control Class D students showed no change. Third grade Class B had 4 students tested for special education services, and one diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. Those students were able to read in their range with little difficulty, but were not able to comprehend what they read. Even though the teacher-researcher decreased their independent reading range, they still were not able to experience success. Those students' possible decline in self-concept as readers could have contributed to the

decreased average scores for Class B. The students in fourth grade targeted Class A revealed a 5% increase in how much they valued reading, and fourth grade control Class C had little change. Students in targeted third grade Class B had a 1% drop in the average value of reading, while control third grade Class D showed a 3% increase. Even though Class B experienced a 1% decline in the average value of reading, they still surpassed the other three classes with the value they placed on reading.

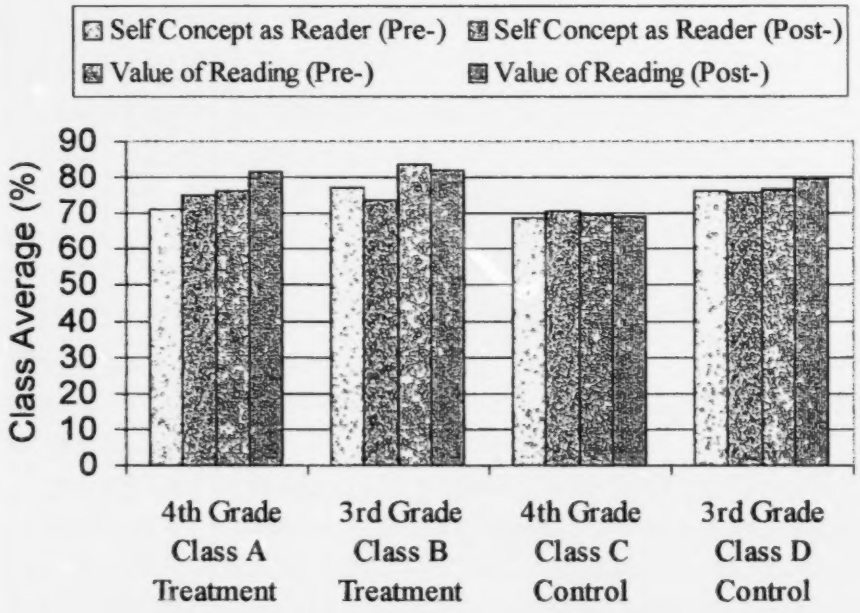

Figure 4 Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) Summary of Pre- and Posttests

The STAR test (Advantage Learning Systems, 1996) was used at the beginning and the end of the project to assess students' grade equivalent (GE) growth in reading. As shown in Figure 5, students in targeted fourth grade Class A demonstrated an average GE growth of 0.6, and those in fourth grade control Class C demonstrated an average growth of 0.7. In targeted third grade Class B, students experienced an average GE growth of 0.6, while those in control third grade Class D experienced an average GE growth of 0.3.

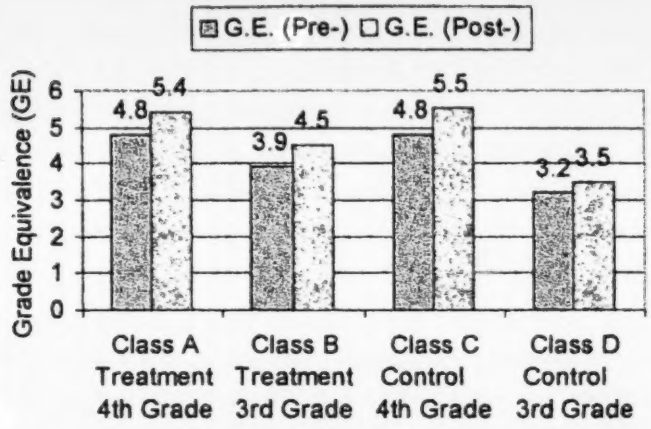

Figure 5 STAR Test Summation of Pre- and Posttest Results

The Gates MacGinitie Reading test (Riverside Publishing Company, 1993 and 2000) was another tool used to assess students' grade equivalent growth in reading during the project. Figure 6 summarizes the results. The average growth in targeted fourth grade Class A was 1.4 and in fourth grade control Class C, it was 1.3. Targeted third grade Class B demonstrated an average GE growth of 2.4, while the average growth of fourth grade control Class D was 1.2.

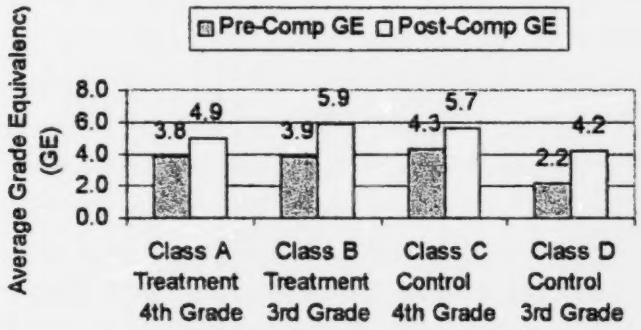

Figure 6 Gates-MacGinitie Summation of Pre- and Posttest Results

A trained professional, other than the teacher-researchers, at each site observed targeted and control classrooms to record off-task behavior during independent reading time using an observation checklist created by researchers (Appendix B). Classes were observed twice before the interventions, and off-task behaviors were recorded and averaged. The same procedure was

used at the end of the project in Class B, but Classes, A, C, and D were only observed once. Therefore, the post-intervention numbers are not based on an average, but reflect only one observation. The results were used to compare the frequency of off-task behaviors before and after the interventions as shown on Table 4. All classes showed a decrease in off-task behaviors. Both control classrooms showed a greater percentage decrease in off-task behaviors than the targeted classrooms. Third grade control Class D had a 20% decline while targeted Class B had a 4% decline in off-task behaviors. A 14.9% decrease was exhibited by fourth grade control Class C and 11% by targeted Class A in off-task behaviors.

Table 4

Summary of Pre- and Post-Observations of Off-Task Behaviors

	Preintervention Average	Postintervention Average	Percentage of Improvement
Class A	35	28	11
Class B	39	36	4
Class C	27	20	15
Class D	30	20	20

Conclusions and Recommendations

The parent questionnaire confirmed the researchers' assessment that the students' attitudes about reading for enjoyment improved. All four classrooms showed improvement in the percentage of students who chose to read independently every day; however, the targeted classrooms improved by a greater percentage than the control classrooms. A larger percentage of students in the targeted classes also chose to read a book when given a choice of free time activities. Further support is provided by the increase in the percentage of students who visited the public library after the interventions in the targeted classes compared to the decrease in visits

in the control classes. Prior to the interventions, 88% of the students in targeted classes were choosing books they could read independently. The percentage increased to 100% after the interventions.

Results from the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey proved to be inconclusive. Fourth grade targeted Class A showed a slight improvement in attitude, while fourth grade control Class C showed little change. Targeted third grade Class B showed little change, while third grade control Class D showed a slight improvement in attitude toward recreational reading. In third grade targeted Class B the teacher researchers believe that the students referred for special education services and Attention Deficit Disorder, who were having difficulty with comprehension, were contributing factors to the slight decrease in attitude.

The Motivation to Read Profile showed a greater increase in students' self-concept as readers and how much they value reading in fourth grade targeted Class A than in fourth grade control Class C. However, students in third grade targeted Class B showed a decrease in self-concept as readers and in how much the value reading, while third grade control Class D showed no change in self-concept and an increase in the value of reading. According to this assessment, fourth grade students showed positive effects from the interventions, and third grade students did not. However, the students in targeted Class B placed a higher value on reading than the students in any of the other classes both before and after the interventions. As a result, the teacher-researchers do not feel that the slight decrease exhibited by targeted Class B was meaningful.

The researchers' goal was to increase reading achievement by more than the four months expected growth over the 18 weeks of the project. On the STAR test, students in targeted fourth grade Class A and third grade Class B showed a six-month growth supporting the effects of the

interventions. Fourth grade control Class C also surpassed expected growth, with a seven-month increase, but students in third grade control Class D only demonstrated three months growth.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading test also showed that the interventions had a positive effect on students' reading achievement. Students in both targeted classes surpassed the growth of students in control classes. The data collected from the STAR test and the Gates-MacGinite Reading test, which are standardized assessments show similar results, validating the researchers' conclusion that the intervention strategies increased reading achievement among targeted students.

The researchers strongly endorse the interventions used in this action research project. Since many students do not read independently at home, teachers need to provide the time to practice reading skills at school. The parent survey showed when students were given more time to read at school, time spent reading at home increased. As the project progressed, the researchers saw the students become increasingly enthusiastic about the daily independent reading time. If the time was missed because of field trips or assemblies, students often begged to have the time rescheduled. In spite of the large number of observed off-task behaviors, students on the whole were very involved in reading during the 40 minutes of reading time. Much of the off-task behavior could be attributed to the students' eagerness to share and discuss what they were reading with their peers or teacher.

The use of the Accelerated Reader program provides a starting point for independent reading levels through the use of the STAR test. It also provides a management tool allowing researchers to monitor, adjust, and evaluate individual students' progress through the results of the computer generated comprehension tests. The software also gives students immediate feedback regarding their progress, which tends to increase their motivation. Another

motivational tool provided by the Accelerated Reader program is the monthly goal set for each student. Students read more as they strive to attain their individual goal and receive a reward. The researchers find that this software program is an invaluable tool for record-keeping and student motivation.

Student-teacher conferencing is a strategy that helps hold students accountable for their reading. Because students know that teachers will be monitoring the amount of reading as well as their comprehension, they are more likely to stay on task during independent reading time. Conferencing also gives students an opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings about what they are reading with the teacher, which in turn allows the teacher further insight into students' reading abilities.

Students show great excitement when given the opportunity to interact with their peers about reading material. They delight in sharing the humor, the drama, and the characters they find in their books. This is a strategy that enhances comprehension and promotes greater acceptance of reading in general. The researchers often observed students choosing books to read based on the recommendation of their peers. Because of time restraints, the researchers were not able to use this intervention as often as was planned, but highly recommend it as an effective strategy to promote enthusiasm for literature.

Researchers found that hearing literature read aloud fosters greater interest in a variety of books. Students are exposed to different genres and authors, which often motivates them to expand their interests and broaden their experiences in reading. After hearing a book read in class, students often read the same book themselves or found another book by the same author. The researchers also found that hearing literature at a higher interest level caused low-achieving students to develop a more positive attitude about reading.

Researchers recommend that teachers provide an environment in which students feel safe about sharing their thoughts and feelings about what they read. It is also important that responses to literature be kept spontaneous and fun and not become arduous written assignments. Recreational reading needs to be viewed as an enjoyable experience by the students.

Researchers propose that teachers make the time to incorporate independent reading into their daily routine. The results of this action research support a positive relationship between independent reading time and achievement. Even though the data on motivation and attitude showed little change, the researchers observed in their students a more positive attitude and a noticeable increase in motivation toward reading. Researchers also feel that if the project had been conducted over a longer period of time, the data might have reflected more the researchers' personal observations.

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Appendices

Appendix A

ID _____
Date _____

Parent Questionnaire on Student Recreational Reading Habits

4 = Often 3 = Sometimes 2 = Seldom 1 = Never	4	3	2	1
1. My child reads independently for enjoyment at home every day.				
2. I read to or with my child.				
3. If given a choice of free time activities, my child will choose to read a book.				
4. We visit the public library.				
5. My child sees me reading.				
6. My child has time each day for free choice activities.				
7. Reading materials are available for my child at home.				
8. My child shares and/or discusses what s/he's reading with me.				
9. I ask my child questions about books s/he is reading.				
10. My child chooses reading material s/he can read independently.				

Appendix B

Date _____

OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

Observe the students as they are reading during the 30-minute silent reading period. Use a tally mark to record each instance of off-task behavior (any behaviors other than reading).

Examples of off-task behaviors may include but are not limited to:

Walking around the room
Talking to another student
    If the other student responds, two tally marks should be recorded.
Playing with items in desk
Physical contact with another student
    If the other student responds, two tally marks should be recorded.
Looking around the room
Flipping through book without reading for more than 30 seconds.
Doodling or drawing
Working on unfinished assignments

Please make a note of any students who display a noticeably greater number of off-task behaviors than the majority of the class.

Tally Marks: _____

_____

_____

_____

TOTAL NUMBER OF OFF-TASK BEHAVIORS _____

NAMES OF STUDENTS EXHIBITING GREATER NUMBER OF OFF-TASK BEHAVIORS THAN AVERAGE:

_____

NAMES OF STUDENTS OFF-TASK FOR MORE THAN 5 MINUTES:

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Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
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